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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 001521

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SUBJECT: KMT CHAIRMAN WU POH-HSIUNG ON PRESIDENT MA YING-JEOU, THE DPP, AND CHEN YUNLIN'S UPCOMING VISIT

Classified By: AIT Director Stephen M. Young,
Reasons: 1.4 (b/d)

¶11. (C) Summary: In a meeting with the Director on October 27, KMT Chairman Wu Poh-hsiung attributed President Ma Ying-jeou's low standing in public opinion polls to the economic downturn, public disappointment that Ma's presidency has not fulfilled expectations, and Ma's early standoffish attitude to his own party. Wu also complained that Ma has been careless in some public statements, giving the DPP an opening to accuse him (incorrectly in Wu's opinion) of diminishing Taiwan's status. Despite the current difficulties, Wu suggested that Ma has an opportunity to recover as the opposition DPP remains mired in its own problems, which include a reputation for violent behavior and a failure to cut links with the controversial former President Chen Shui-bian. Wu stressed the importance for the visit by the PRC's Chen Yunlin to go forward despite the large DPP protest on October 25. He expressed hope Chen Yunlin would find a way to express regret for the harm to Taiwan caused by the import of melamine-contaminated milk powder. End Summary.

President Ma Ying-jeou's Problems

¶12. (C) In a meeting at KMT headquarters on October 27, the Director asked Chairman Wu Poh-hsiung why President Ma Ying-jeou's approval rating in recent polling is so low (in the mid-20's). Wu attributed Ma's low showing to various factors, including the economic downturn. Because Ma came into office with such high expectations, the fall in his polling numbers has been precipitous. Some KMT supporters who bought stocks after Ma's election are of course unhappy with the fall in their share values, Wu observed. In addition, Ma hurt himself by trying to draw a line between himself and the party when he first came into office, neglecting his staunchest supporters in the KMT. Now, however, he is working to correct this problem, establishing closer relations with the party.

¶13. (C) Ma also has not been articulate in expressing his positions, often not providing a full context for his points, Wu said. For example, Ma did not take into account how the public would react when he described Taiwan and the mainland as two districts and when he said relations between Taiwan and the mainland were not state-to-state relations. The DPP has been adept at pulling out controversial statements by Ma

to claim he is diminishing Taiwan's status. This is not true, however, as Ma's position is based on the constitution, Wu argued.

¶4. (C) Former TECRO Representative Stephen Chen, who accompanied Wu at the meeting, observed that many pan-Blue supporters are unhappy with Ma's handling of the corruption case of former DPP President Chen Shui-bian. While they want Ma to take action against Chen, Ma says he has to act according to the law.

The DPP Has Its Own Problems

¶5. (C) Despite his current low standing in the polls, Ma has an opportunity to recover before the next presidential election in 2012, Wu maintained. It is very difficult to imagine the DPP returning to power in 2012, the KMT chairman said, adding that he doubted people dissatisfied with the KMT would think the DPP would do a better job. The DPP's problems are that it has not effectively separated itself from Chen Shui-bian's corruption, and it seems unable to prevent supporters who take to the streets from engaging in violence. Sooner or later, there will be problems caused by DPP protesters, Wu predicted.

¶6. (C) Wu attributed the high turnout for the DPP protest demonstration on October 25 to economic problems and to the efforts of party fundamentalists who are opposed to the mainland. However, the DPP estimate of 600,000 participants was at least three times too high, he suggested. Stephen

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Chen observed that the DPP bussed in some of the participants from other areas.

Upcoming Visit of ARATS Chairman Chen Yunlin

¶7. (C) On the upcoming visit of Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) Chairman Chen Yunlin, which begins November 3, Wu stressed that the two sides cannot stop their exchanges just because of problems (caused by protesters). If the demonstrators go too far during Chen's visit, it will not be good for the DPP. However, Wu expressed some concern about whether the party leadership could control the base.

¶8. (C) Wu indicated he expects to meet Chen Yunlin during the visit, but added that a meeting has not yet been arranged. During the visit, Wu said, he hoped Chen would find a way to express PRC regret for the harm caused to Taiwan by the import of melamine-tainted milk powder. Wu also noted that contrary to some DPP arguments, Chen's visit will be on a basis of equality since ARATS and Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) have the same status.

¶9. (C) According to Wu, party unity is not a problem because KMT leaders have no choice but to give the government full support. However, he acknowledged that one reason for the low polling numbers for Ma and the cabinet is the criticism of the government by KMT members and supporters. Although it is the job of legislators to criticize the government, it is important for the KMT's legislators to avoid "scolding" the premier and cabinet. On another topic involving the KMT leadership, Wu confirmed that KMT Honorary Chairman Lien Chan is a candidate to serve as Taiwan's representative to the upcoming APEC Informal Leaders Meeting in Peru, but he suggested a final decision has not yet been made.

2009 Local Elections

¶10. (C) Wu said the KMT will only begin preparing for the December 2009 local elections after it holds its party congress on November 22, 2008. According to Wu, the KMT is

in no hurry to name candidates and may want to see first who the DPP nominates in certain races. While the KMT may nominate some candidates early, it may well wait until three months before the elections to select some of its candidates.

The Director noted that Magistrate Chou Hsi-wei (KMT) could have some difficulties being reelected in Taipei County. If needed, Wu said, the KMT can choose a stronger candidate, reassigning an incumbent magistrate to a position in the central government.

Comment

¶11. (C) Wu was clearly pained by Ma Ying-jeou's low polling numbers. Although the numbers reflect economic difficulties, they are also indicative of Ma's weak political leadership and his apparent insensitivity to the views of the many ethnic Taiwanese who support the opposition. Ma is also the victim of the exaggerated expectations that he and the KMT raised in the election campaign. Because the DPP is still floundering, however, Ma will have an opportunity to make course corrections in the coming months. Wu, other KMT leaders, and legislators will doubtless have plenty of advice for Ma and the cabinet. Wu indicated that, if needed, he would be prepared to continue as party chairman when the position comes open next year.

SYOUNG